



News

Bureau of Land Management, Alaska State Office, External Affairs
222 W. 7th Avenue #13, Anchorage AK 99513-7599
Tel: 907-271-5555 Fax: 907-272-3430

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contacts: Jody Weil, 907-271-4418
Edward Bovy, 907-271-3318**

News Release No. AK-4-04

Date: November 20, 2003

BLM Announces Availability of Leasing Plan for NW National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska

Bureau of Land Management's Alaska State Director, Henri Bisson today announced the availability of a plan for oil and gas leasing in 8.8 million acres of federal lands and the federal subsurface lands in the northwest corner of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

"This plan will help us implement Congressional direction to maximize the production of the oil and gas resources in an environmentally-safe manner while protecting the important biological, subsistence and cultural values also found in this area," Bisson said.

The plan detailed in the *The Final Northwest National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Integrated Activity Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement* includes a variety of restrictions and designations designed to protect water quality, vegetation, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, subsistence uses and scenic/recreational values.

The plan incorporates analysis of public comments received on the draft plan released in January 2003, as well as descriptions of five possible management alternatives. The preferred alternative was developed by BLM specialists after evaluating comments received from the public, residents of the North Slope Borough, Native corporations, state and local government, industry, and various interest groups.

Key provisions under the leasing plan include:

- Defer leasing on about 1.5 million acres (17 percent of the planning area) near Wainwright for the next 10 years

-more-

- Recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of 102,000 acres as the Kasegaluk Lagoon Special Area
- Provide no surface occupancy stipulations along coastal areas, in deep-water lakes, along key rivers (16 percent of the planning area), and in the Kasegaluk Lagoon Special Area
- Designate special study areas for Pacific black brandt and caribou
- Conduct areawide studies on habitat for Spectacled and Steller's eiders (both listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act) and yellow-billed loons
- Implement stipulations to minimize loss of raptor foraging habitat within the existing Colville River Special Area

Other stipulations and required operating procedures establish restrictions and guidance that apply to waste prevention and spills, water use, winter overland moves and seismic activity, exploratory drilling, aircraft use and subsistence consultation.

The plan was mailed Nov. 19, 2003, to public libraries throughout Alaska, Federal Depository libraries throughout the country, and to Alaska state and local government. An executive summary of the document and maps are posted on the internet, and can be reached through the BLM home page, www.ak.blm.gov.

Bisson anticipates BLM will hold a lease sale for selected tracts in the northwest portion of NPRA next June. A Record of Decision is anticipated on or after December 28, 2003.

###